



Streams in the Desert: Learning from the Desert Fathers and Mothers

**Presented by
Jon Stotts**

Sundays in Lent
9:45am-10:45am
West Wing of the Parish Center

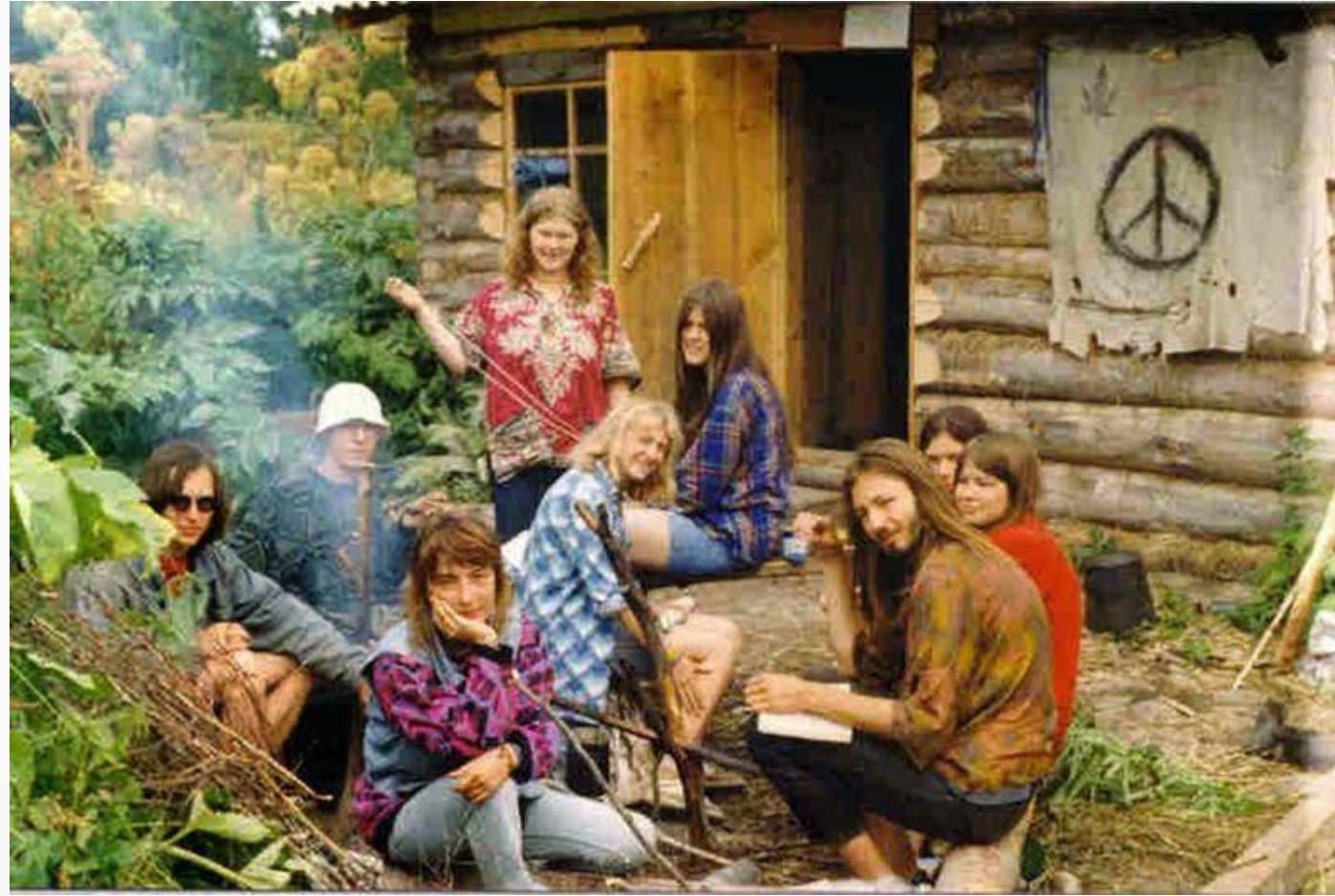
Streams in the Desert – An Overview

- ▶ Session 1 –Who are the Desert Fathers and Mothers?
- ▶ Session 2 – Dead Or Alive? Empire, Church, and the Desert
- ▶ Session 3 – A Ballad of Love and Hate: God, Neighbor, and Self in Desert Spirituality
- ▶ Session 4 – Fighting with Demons: Thoughts and Desires in the Spiritual Life
- ▶ Session 5 – Becoming Like Fire: What It Means to Be Saved

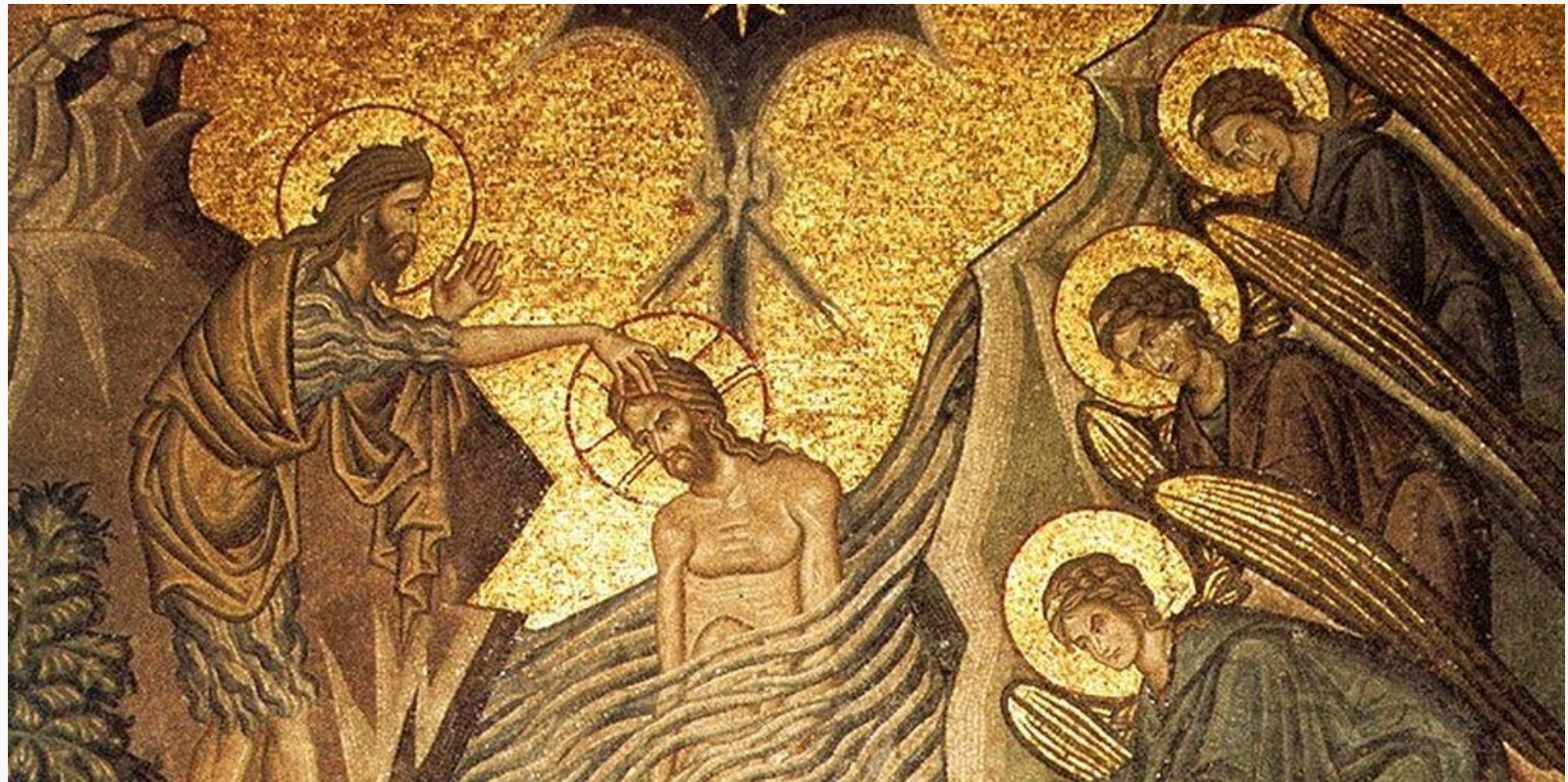
⁹And it came to pass in those days that Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized in the Jordan by John. ¹⁰And as he was coming up out of the water, he immediately saw the heavens being ripped apart and the Spirit like a dove descending upon him; ¹¹and a voice came out of the heavens: "You are my beloved son; in you I have taken delight."

¹²And immediately the Spirit cast him out into the wilderness, ¹³and he was in the wilderness forty days, being tested by Satan; and he was with the wild animals; and the angels were serving him.

(Mark 1:9-13)



Baptism – Dying in order to find life



Baptism – Dying in order to find life



Our life and our death is with our neighbor. If we gain our sister or brother, we have gained God, but if we cause our sister or brother to stumble, we have sinned against Christ.' (Abba Anthony)



- ▶ When are your relationships at their best? When are you most able to be available to others, truly present to their concerns, their joys, their struggles?
- ▶ What gets in the way of this?
- ▶ (Alternative: What keeps people from being available to YOU?)

Why did the desert fathers and mothers flee?



What did the desert fathers and mothers flee?



The desert fathers and mothers fled...

- Family and village life
- Politics (church and state conflict)
- Culture (education being civilized)



Flight from family and village life



Abba Olympius of the Cells was tempted to fornication. His thoughts said to him, 'Go, and take a wife.' He got up, found some mud, made a woman and said to himself, 'Here is your wife, now you must work hard in order to feed her.' So he worked, giving himself a great deal of trouble. The next day, making some mud again, he formed it into a girl and said to his thoughts, 'Your wife has had a child, you must work harder so as to be able to feed her and clothe your child.' So, he wore himself out doing this, and said to his thoughts, 'I cannot bear this weariness any longer.' They answered, 'If you cannot bear such weariness, stop wanting a wife.' God, seeing his efforts, took away the conflict from him and he was at peace."

Flight from politics (church and state conflict)



Abba David related this about Abba Arsenius. One day a magistrate came, bringing him the will of a senator, a member of his family who had left him a very large inheritance. Arsenius took it and was about to destroy it. But the magistrate threw himself at his feet saying, 'I beg you, do not destroy it or they will cut off my head.' Abba Arsenius said to him, 'But I was dead long before this senator who has just died,' and he returned the will to him without accepting anything.

Flight from politics (church and state conflict)



Some heretics came to Abba Poemen one day and began to speak evil of the archbishop of Alexandria suggesting that he had received the laying on of hands from priests. The old man, who had remained silent till then, called his brother and said, 'Set the table, give them something to eat and send them away in peace.'

Flight from culture (education and being civilized)



One day Abba Arsenius consulted an old Egyptian monk about his own thoughts. Someone noticed this and said to him, 'Abba Arsenius, how is it that you with such a good Latin and Greek education, ask this peasant about your thoughts?' He replied, 'I have indeed been taught Latin and Greek, but I do not know even the alphabet of this peasant.'

Social Death

Abba Poemen said that a brother asked Abba Moses how someone could consider himself as dead towards his neighbour. The old man said to him, 'If a man does not think in his heart that he is already three days dead and in the tomb, he cannot attain this saying.'



Where could you use some distance from...

- A family or work conflict?
- A troubling political issue?
- A troubling religious issue?
- Expectations about how you ought to live or behave?
- Views about the “real world” and how things “really are”?



The Distance of Love

Our life and our death is with our neighbor. If we gain our sister or brother, we have gained God, but if we cause our sister or brother to stumble, we have sinned against Christ.'



Baptism – Dying in order to find life



Next Week - Fighting with Our Demons: Thoughts and Desires in the Spiritual Life



- Gluttony
- Lust
- Avarice
- Anger
- Sloth
- Sadness
- Vainglory
- Pride